**Nomen and full heading:**

**Astra’s Diary: Socrates vs. Roman School**

I knew I should have paid more attention to my Greek history tutor! Tempus had to keep reminding me that Socrates’ “school” was very different than Roman school. For starters, he insisted that he wasn’t a teacher and refused to take any money from those who learned from him. He wouldn’t even take a fee from us for his help in training Fido! It makes sense that he didn’t claim to be a teacher, because he didn’t give lectures or assign anything. Instead, he asked questions. Socrates asked EVERYONE questions – about almost everything – religion, art, mathematics, freedom, justice, all sorts of virtues. His questions made some people think about the moral issues in the city or in their jobs, and some people got really annoyed by him. He influenced several young men though who wanted to learn to speak and think like him – to examine everything thoroughly. Because of Socrates, we now have a whole style of learning named after him called the Socratic Method – this is when you learn by discussing a topic, asking and answering questions about it in order to understand the deeper ideas behind it. I wish I’d had more time to talk to Socrates about the nature of Fate – then maybe we would know how to defeat Dis when he is messing with what is fated!

In Rome, school was very different. Most girls wouldn’t attend a regular Roman school, but my dad worked really hard to pay for a private tutor for me to learn all sorts of subjects. Otherwise, at about the age of seven, parents might pay for their son to attend a school run by a **Ludi Magister**. It wasn’t required by law to attend, but these types of schools were pretty affordable as they paid a fee directly to the teacher. They might meet in a room or in a public space – kind of like how Socrates met with his followers in marketplaces or public squares all around Athens! But Roman students had to take notes and practice writing and basic math – they would do all this using a wax tablet and stilus. A stilus is like a stick that is pointy on one end to write in the wax, and blunt on the other end to rub out mistakes. Sometimes a stilus could be very fancy, but there were simple ones too – they could be made out of metal, bone, or ivory. I once got a beautiful ivory stylus for my eighth birthday – it had a pattern etched into it and carving of the goddess Minerva at the top. Now I’m writing on papyrus using a pot of ink and a sharpened quill. I better be careful not to make any mistakes!

After students learned to read and write proper Latin (and sometimes a little Greek too), they might continue onto a second stage of Roman School where they meet with a **Grammaticus**. Not everyone would go to this type of school. They might just end their education at about eleven years old! Most upper class families chose to attend to this type of advanced school, and here students would read important works of Greek and Roman literature. They would also study grammar, history, and geography so they could understand the backgrounds of everything they read. I once had a friend who told me his Grammaticus made them memorize a long passage from Homer or Vergil once a week!

The third and final stage is with a **Rhetor** who would teach his students how to speak eloquently and debate. This is important for those who wanted to work in the law courts or government. They had to practice how to persuade an audience with different tactics and what gestures to use when speaking publicly.

Personally, I am a big fan of Socrates and his style, which is why I was so concerned when I saw Dis talking to the Athenian magistrates. Tempus and I snuck over to eavesdrop on the conversation. Apparently, Dis was trying to convince several citizens that Socrates had been a bad influence on the youth of the city. Now I know my history well enough to remember that Socrates had been put on trial and sentenced to death for this – I didn’t know that Dis had a played a part in spreading such rumors! I told Tempus that I think we were supposed to save Socrates! He looked doubtful, but said we could try, so we went forward one year in time to 399 BC. I had the escape plot all mapped out.

We recruited help from one of Socrates’ followers named Crito. He took us to visit Socrates in prison before dawn on the day of his execution. I was so excited to tell him all about the plan to smuggle him out of prison. I practically forgot to breathe and was speaking so quickly that some of my words blended together as I explained it all to him. Tempus would put on a disguise to make himself look like Socrates. He had brought a fake beard and everything. We would stay in the jail to fool the guards while Socrates left, disguised like me! We could easily leave a few hours later using our handy means of transportation via time travel. Meanwhile, Crito had everything arranged for Socrates to live safely in exile outside of Athens.

It was brilliant. It was flawless. But Socrates said no. Crito tried everything to persuade him, but Socrates said his reputation didn’t matter as much as doing what is just and behaving correctly. I thought that was nonsense – it was unjust that he had been condemned! But Socrates explained that it was a part of his social contract with the laws of the city and that escaping would be an act of injustice to that contract. He said that it was never good to respond to injustice with further injustice of his own making. I tried everything to persuade him too. I told him that it was fated for us to rescue him, but not even that would budge him. He gazed at me for a long time, then whispered quietly that if he had to choose between acting with justice and following the fates, then he would choose justice.

“And remember, Astra,” he said. “I told you once that there is no reason to fear that which we don’t know – even death.”

Socrates was determined to stay for his execution and later would drink the vial of hemlock – a type of poison – that he was given. Tempus led me outside. I was blind with tears, but more importantly – I was furious! Why didn’t Tempus understand that this would mean letting Dis win? He had influenced the Athenians to put Socrates to death – isn’t it our job to stop him?

I’ll never forget what Tempus said. He said that maybe Dis wasn’t winning this round after all. He had tried to get Socrates killed in order to stop his ideas from spreading, but he didn’t understand the power behind an idea. Socrates had influenced so many young thinkers who would carry those ideas to the future. Dis may have succeeded by having the man executed, but the philosopher’s quest for truth would live long after him.

**Exercise: Reading Comprehension Questions – answer the following questions on a separate piece of paper**

1. What is the Socratic Method?

2. What kinds of things would Socrates ask questions about?

3. How much would Socrates charge for his “lessons”?

4. What types of materials would Roman students use to write?

5. What is the first stage of Roman school called and what would students learn?

6. What is the second stage of Roman school called and what would students learn?

7. What is the third stage of Roman school called and what would students learn?

8. Why was Socrates put on trial?

9. Explain why Socrates says that there is no reason to fear death.

10. Do you think Socrates should have escaped? Why or why not?